

judicial officials failed to properly investigate violence against women and girls and bring perpetrators to justice.

Women and girls continued to be beaten, raped and killed. They were targeted and attacked by armed groups, and faced discrimination by the authorities and threats within their own communities and families. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission documented more than 4,000 cases of violence against women from 21 March to 21 October – a rise of 28% compared with the same period for 2011, reportedly due to increased public awareness. The actual number of incidents was likely to be still higher given the continuing stigma and risk of reprisal associated with reporting such violence.

■ In May, an appeals court in Kabul upheld prison sentences of 10 years each in the case against the in-laws of an Afghan girl. The girl had been severely abused by them after being forced to marry at the age of 13.

■ In July, an Afghan woman, named in media reports as 22-year-old Najiba, was shot dead on “charges” of adultery, reportedly by a Taliban insurgent.

■ On 16 September, a 16-year-old girl was publicly flogged in the southern province of Ghazni for an “illicit relationship”. The girl had been sentenced to 100 lashes, following a verdict issued by three mullahs in Jaghori district.

■ On 10 December, Nadia Sidiqi, the acting head of the Department for Women’s Affairs in Laghman province, was killed by unidentified gunmen while on her way to work. Her predecessor, Hanifa Safi, was killed and her family injured by a remote-controlled explosive device on 13 July. No one claimed responsibility for either incident.

Refugees and internally displaced people

By the end of October, about half a million people remained internally displaced as a result of the conflict and natural disaster. Many continued to seek refuge in city slums and other informal settlements, fashioning makeshift shelters from plastic sheeting, and living under the constant threat of forced and sometimes violent evictions. Poor sanitation and lack of access to education and health care coupled with bitter 2011/2012 weather conditions meant that scores died of illness, cold or both. Over 100, mainly children, reportedly died during this period amid criticism over the lack of timely humanitarian assistance provided. By March, the government had

responded with an announcement that it was developing a comprehensive national policy on internal displacement.

In September, the Pakistan government agreed that Afghan refugees could remain in Pakistan for another three years, rescinding an order by officials in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province calling for all illegal Afghan immigrants to leave the country by 25 May, or face imprisonment and deportation.

Death penalty

On 20 and 21 November, the authorities executed 14 prisoners on death row, the first executions since June 2011, despite serious concerns about the lack of guarantee of a fair trial in the country. Thirty people had their death sentences confirmed by the Supreme Court; 10 people had their death sentences commuted to long prison terms. By the end of November more than 250 people remained on death row.

Amnesty International visits/reports

✈ Amnesty International delegates visited Afghanistan in February, March, May, June, October and December.

📄 Fleeing war, finding misery: The plight of the internally displaced in Afghanistan (ASA 11/001/2012)

📄 Strengthening the rule of law and protection of human rights, including women’s rights, is key to any development plan for Afghanistan (ASA 11/012/2012)

📄 Open letter to the Government of Afghanistan, the United Nations, other humanitarian organizations and international donors (ASA 11/019/2012)

ALBANIA

REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Head of state: **Bujar Nishani (replaced Bamir Topi in July)**

Head of government: **Sali Berisha**

The government adopted reforms which restricted the immunity of MPs and other public officials from prosecution and revised the Electoral Code, following previous allegations of fraud. In December, the European Council postponed the granting of EU candidate status to Albania, conditional on further reform.

Enforced disappearances

In November, proceedings before the Serious Crimes Court concerning the enforced disappearance in 1995 of Remzi Hoxha, an ethnic Albanian from Macedonia, and the torture of two other Albanian men, ended with the conviction of three former state security agents. One of them, Ilir Kumbaro, who fled extradition proceedings in the UK in 2011, was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment in his absence. The charges against his two co-defendants were changed by the court to offences covered by a 1997 amnesty, resulting in them not being sentenced. In December, all three defendants appealed against their convictions.

Unlawful killings

In May, the trial opened of former Republican Guard commander, Ndreia Prendi, and former Guard officer, Agim Llupo, charged with killing four protesters, the injury of two others, and concealing evidence. The charges arose from violent clashes between police and protesters during anti-government demonstrations in January 2011 in Tirana.

Torture and other ill-treatment

In June, the UN Committee against Torture expressed concerns about the lack of effective and impartial investigations by the Ministry of Interior into alleged ill-treatment by law enforcement officers. The Committee also reported that basic safeguards against torture were not provided to people in detention, including timely access to lawyers and doctors, and noted the excessive length of pre-trial detention.

In July, four prison guards were each fined 3,100 leks (€22) by Tirana District Court for beating Sehat Doci in Prison 313 in August 2011.

■ In September, a group of former political prisoners went on hunger strike in protest against the government's prolonged failure to provide reparations for their imprisonment by the communist government between 1944 and 1991. Thousands were imprisoned or sent to labour camps during this period and subjected to degrading treatment and, often, torture. During the 31-day protest, two men set themselves on fire; one, Lirak Bejko, died of his injuries in November. The Ombudsperson considered the actions of the Tirana police in denying hunger strikers medicines and liquids to be an act of torture.

Violence in the family

There were 2,526 reported incidents of domestic violence, 345 more than in the previous year, and petitions by victims for court protection orders also increased. Most victims were women. An amendment to the Criminal Code making violence in the family an offence punishable by up to five years' imprisonment came into force in April. However, there was no minimum sentence for such offences, except when committed repeatedly and prosecutions could only be initiated on the basis of a victim's complaint.

The Director of the National Centre for Victims of Domestic Violence was dismissed in May, after the Ombudsperson investigated complaints by women at the Centre that they had been subjected to arbitrary punishments and restrictions.

Discrimination

Roma

Many Roma continued to be denied their right to adequate housing.

■ Some Roma, forced to move from their homes near Tirana railway station after a 2011 arson attack, were evicted from temporary tented accommodation. In February, lacking adequate alternative housing, eight families moved briefly into the premises of the Ombudsperson's Office. They were later transferred to disused military barracks. However, their very poor accommodation and inadequate police protection from threats and attacks by the neighbouring community obliged them to leave. By the end of the year, no permanent solution to their housing had been found.

■ In July, the livelihoods of an estimated 800 Romani families were affected when Tirana police implemented an administrative order prohibiting the collection of scrap and other recyclable materials by seizing their vehicles and other equipment. The Ombudsperson opened an inquiry into excessive use of force and ill-treatment by police during the operation.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people

The first Tirana Pride took place in May. In July, Tirana Prosecutor's Office dismissed a criminal complaint by LGBTI organizations against Deputy Minister of Defence Ekrem Spahiu about his homophobic remarks concerning the Pride.

Housing rights – orphans

Young people leaving social care remained at risk of homelessness, despite legislation guaranteeing homeless registered orphans up to the age of 30 priority access to social housing. Many continued to live in dilapidated disused school dormitories or struggled to pay for low-grade private rented accommodation.

ALGERIA

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

Head of state: **Abdelaziz Bouteflika**

Head of government: **Abdelmalek Sellal (replaced Ahmed Ouyahia in September)**

The authorities continued to restrict freedoms of expression, association and assembly, dispersing demonstrations and harassing human rights defenders. Women faced discrimination in law and practice. Perpetrators of gross human rights abuses during the 1990s, and torture and other ill-treatment against detainees in subsequent years, continued to benefit from impunity. Armed groups carried out lethal attacks. At least 153 death sentences were reported; there were no executions.

Background

The year saw protests and demonstrations by trade unionists and others against unemployment, poverty and corruption. These were dispersed by the security forces, which also thwarted planned demonstrations by blocking access or arresting protesters.

Algeria's human rights record was assessed under the UN Universal Periodic Review in May. The government failed to address recommendations to abolish laws originating under the state of emergency, in force from 1992 until 2011, to ease restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly, and to recognize the right to truth of families of victims of enforced disappearances during the 1990s.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visited Algeria in September, and discussed with the authorities a long-requested visit by the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

Freedoms of expression and association

New laws on information and associations adopted in December 2011 restricted media reporting of issues relevant to state security, national sovereignty and Algeria's economic interests, and tightened controls on NGOs, empowering the authorities to suspend or dissolve them and deny them registration or funding. Journalists faced prosecution for defamation under the Penal Code.

■ Manseur Si Mohamed, a journalist at *La Nouvelle République* newspaper in Mascara, was fined and sentenced to two months' imprisonment in June for making "defamatory comments" in reporting that a state official had failed to implement a judicial decision. He remained at liberty pending an appeal.

■ In October, the authorities rejected an application for registration from the National Association for the fight against corruption (ANLC), giving no specific reasons.

Freedom of assembly

Despite lifting the state of emergency in 2011, the authorities continued to prohibit demonstrations in Algiers under a 2001 decree. There and elsewhere, security forces either prevented demonstrations by blocking access and making arrests or dispersed them through actual or threatened force.

■ On 24 April, security forces were reported to have beaten up and arrested judicial clerks engaged in a sit-in protest over their working conditions.

Human rights defenders

The authorities continued to harass human rights defenders, including through the courts.

■ Abdelkader Kherba, a member of the Algerian League for the Defence of Human Rights (LADDH) and the National Committee for the Defence of the Rights of the Unemployed (CNDDC), was fined and received a suspended prison sentence of one year in May after a court convicted him of "direct incitement to a gathering" for joining and filming a sit-in protest by judicial clerks. He was held in custody from 19 April to 3 May. He was again arrested, detained and prosecuted after attempting to film a demonstration against water cuts at Ksar El Boukhari, Médéa, in August. Charged with insulting and committing violence against an official, he was acquitted and released on 11 September.

■ Yacine Zaïd, a trade union activist and president of the LADDH's Laghouat branch, was arrested and